

French Symbolism

Symbolism

“To depict not the thing, but the effect it produces”

—Mallarmé



Rimbaud



Rambo

Arthur Rimbaud

- ❖ 1854-1891
- ❖ Absent father, strict mother (“bouche d’ombre”)
- ❖ Precocious; unconventional; *enfant terrible* (1870-1880)
- ❖ Poetry is “long, immense and rational derangement of all the senses”
- ❖ 1871-1873 with Paul Verlaine: vagabond life, absinthe, hashish, bisexuality, scandal
- ❖ “Settles down” — nomadic life, gun runner in Abyssinia





THE
DANGERS
OF DRINKING
ABSINTHE





Elzéar Bonnier

Emile Blémont

Jean Aicard

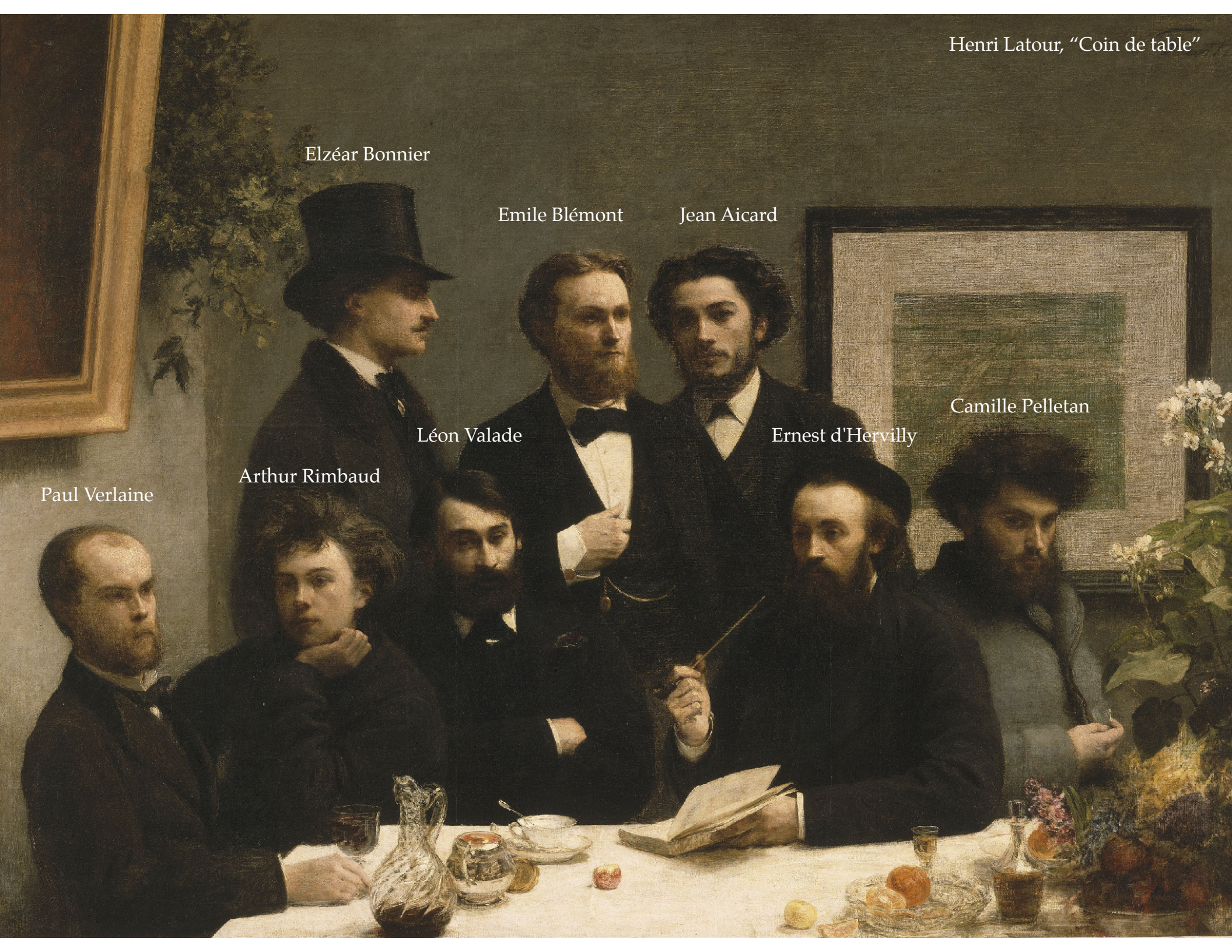
Léon Valade

Ernest d'Hervilly

Camille Pelletan

Arthur Rimbaud

Paul Verlaine





freed^mo

Symbolism

- ❖ Wrong: Birds symbolize freedom! (not often, maybe never?)
- ❖ Right: Confusion — meanings are fused together
- ❖ *Synesthesia* is emblematic of this kind of symbolism



Birds symbolize freedom?



8 Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
"Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sure no craven,
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore -
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!"
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."





I KNOW
WHY THE
CAGED BIRD SINGS



a long, prodigious, and rational disordering of all the senses

Vowels

- * Enigmatic, personal
- * Beauty *and* disgust (“black velvet jacket of brilliant flies”)
- * This fusion leads to ecstasy, the divine (O, the Omega)
- * Disparate senses, beginning and end, produce... unity!
- * Sound, effect, movement (not meaning) = *total art*



Vowels

A Black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: vowels,
I shall tell, one day, of your mysterious origins:
A, black velvety jacket of brilliant flies
Which buzz around cruel smells,

Gulfs of shadow; E, whiteness of vapors and of tents,
Lances of proud glaciers, white kings, shivers of cow-parsley;
I, purples, spat blood, smile of beautiful lips
In anger or in the raptures of penitence;

U, waves, divine shudderings of viridian seas,
The peace of pastures dotted with animals, the peace of the furrows
Which alchemy prints on broad studious foreheads;

O, sublime Trumpet full of strange piercing sounds,
Silences crossed by Worlds and by Angels:
O the Omega, the violet ray of Her Eyes!

Here's an approximation of the basic mapping of the letters and numerals, taken individually, to colors:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Here they are again, over a dark background:



A B C D E F G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

This may seem odd, but it gets stranger. What you see above are the colors of the letters taken in isolation. But when placed in the context of a *word*, a letter's color can change quite dramatically.

First of all, vowels almost always fade into the background in the presence of consonants. They also tend to pick up some of the color of letters nearby. For example, the "A" in my name is overwhelmed by the strong green of the letters around it:

Gymnopedie #1



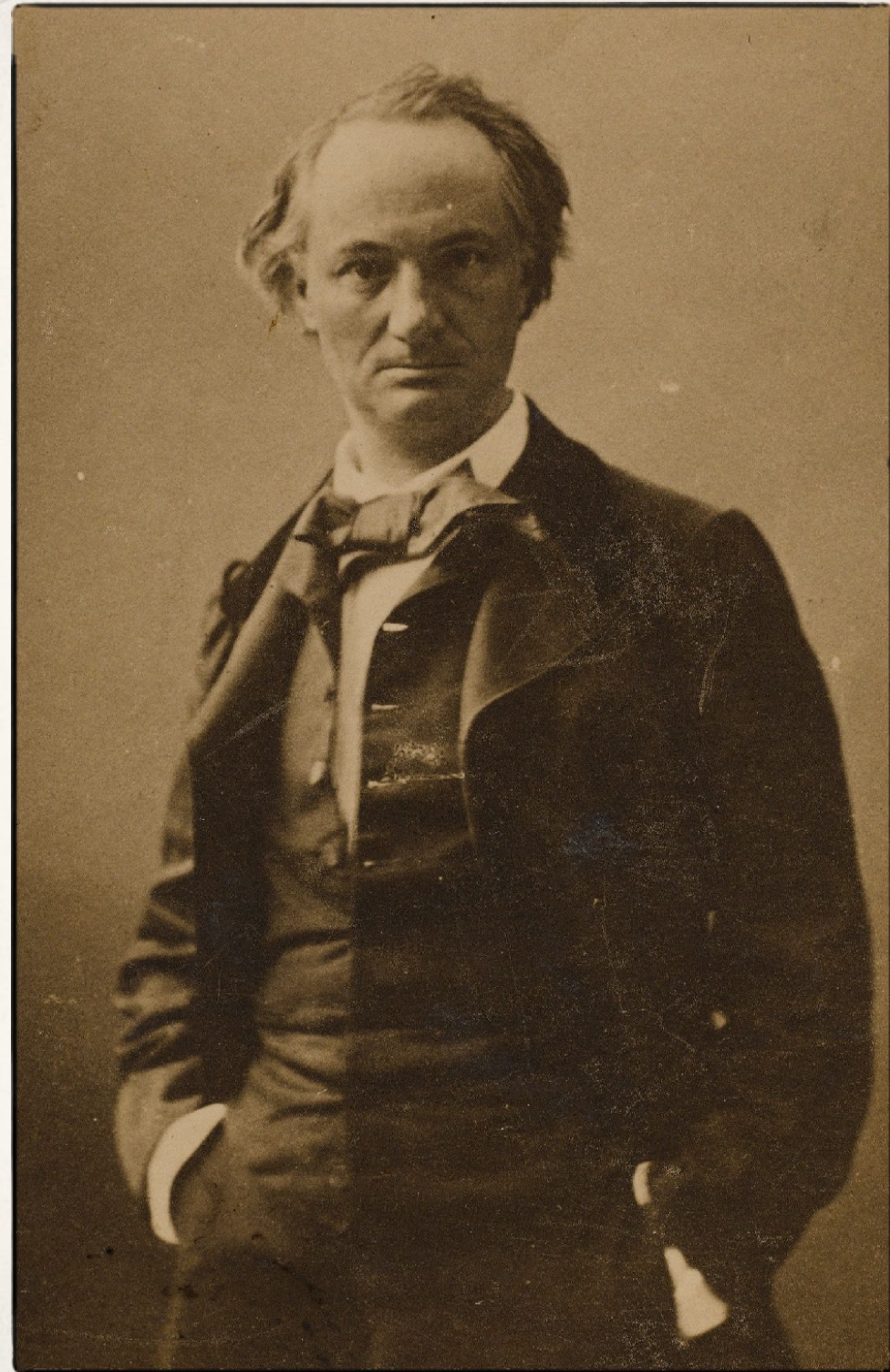
Charles Baudelaire

- * 1821-1867
- * *Les Fleurs du mal* (*Flowers of Evil*, 1857)
- * Expelled from school; libertine (VD, opium, hashish)
- * 1841 trip to India to get him out of trouble
- * Inspired by Edgar Allen Poe, perpetually miserable, broke
- * Created a cult



Writing

- * Baudelaire is *the* key link between Romanticism and Modernism:
 - * Anti-poetic
 - * Romanticism declaimed; Baudelaire often *suggested*
 - * Romanticism relied on intense emotion; Baudelaire, the symbol
 - * Took realist hatred of bourgeoisie to *decadence*





Eugène Carrière, *Young Mothers*



Eugène Carrière, *Motherly Love*



De Feure, *Woman in a Black Hat*



Munch, *The Vampire*

Mossa,
Salomé



Mossa,
Elle (She)



Mossa,
Elle (She)



Mossa,
Pierrot s'en va



Redon,
Cactus Man

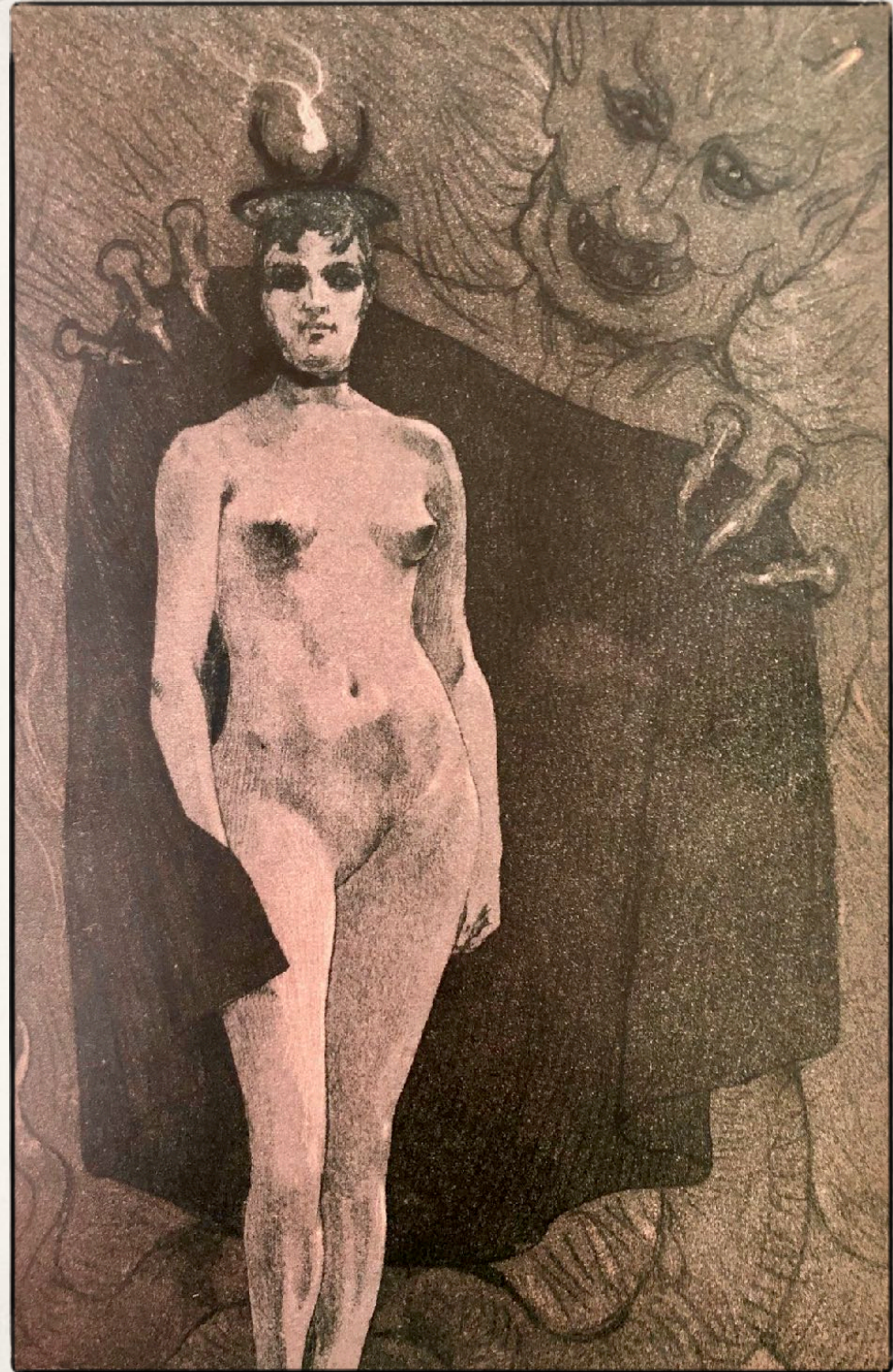


Rops, *Pornocrates*



“To the Reader”

- ❖ Anti-poetry
- ❖ Romanticism’s “artist on the edge” taken to the extreme;
Dostoevskian
- ❖ Assault on bourgeois *reader*



To the Reader

Folly, error, sin and parsimony
Preoccupy our spirits and work on our bodies
Feeding our consciences
Like beggars nourishing their lice.

Like a poor sinner who kisses and consumes
The tortured breast of an ancient whore,
We steal in passing a clandestine joy
We squeeze as strongly as a withered fruit.

If rape and poison, arson and the knife
Have not yet woven their pleasant designs
On the dull canvas of our lowly destinies
It is because our soul, alas, is not yet bold enough!

To the Reader

But among the jackals, panthers and chimerae
The monkeys, scorpions, vultures and the snakes
The monsters yelping, shouting, grunting, crawling
In the ill-famed menagerie of all our vices

Is one more ugly, evil, fouler than the rest
Making no grand gestures or great cries
Yet it would gladly lay waste to the earth
And with a yawn would swallow up the world

And it is Boredom! Eye laden with involuntary tears,
Dreaming of scaffolds, pulls upon its pipe
You know it, reader, this delicate monster
— Hypocrite reader, — my likeness, — my brother!

“Correspondences”

- ❖ Re-writing of Romantic nature
- ❖ The Symbolist symbol
- ❖ The decadent turn
- ❖ The *vocative* in “Vowels”



Correspondances

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,—
Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.

Correspondences

Nature is a temple in which living pillars
Sometimes give voice to confused words;
Man passes there through forests of symbols
Which look at him with understanding eyes.

Like prolonged echoes mingling in the distance
In a deep and tenebrous unity,
Vast as the dark of night and as the light of day,
Perfumes, sounds, and colors correspond.

Correspondences

There are perfumes as cool as the flesh of children,
Sweet as oboes, green as meadows—
And others are corrupt, and rich, triumphant,

With power to expand into infinity,
Like amber and incense, musk, benzoin,
That sing the ecstasy of the soul and senses.

“Parisian Dream”

“Kubla Khan”

- ❖ Poetic construction of a place
- ❖ Sensual
- ❖ “Total art”—the palace melts;
“the *shadow* of the dome of
pleasure / floated midway on
the waves / where was heard
the *mingled* measure...”
- ❖ What changes?
Transcendence needs
immanence



Parisian Dream I

This morning I am still entranced
By the image, distant and dim,
Of that awe-inspiring landscape
Such as no mortal ever saw.

Sleep is full of miracles!
Obeying a curious whim,
I had banned from that spectacle
Irregular vegetation,

And, painter proud of his genius,
I savored in my picture
The delightful monotony
Of water, marble, and metal.

Parisian Dream I

Babel of arcades and stairways,
It was a palace infinite,
Full of basins and of cascades
Falling on dull or burnished gold,

And heavy waterfalls,
Like curtains of crystal,
Were hanging, bright and resplendent,
From ramparts of metal.

Not with trees but with colonnades
The sleeping ponds were encircled;
In these mirrors huge naiads
Admired themselves like women.

Parisian Dream I

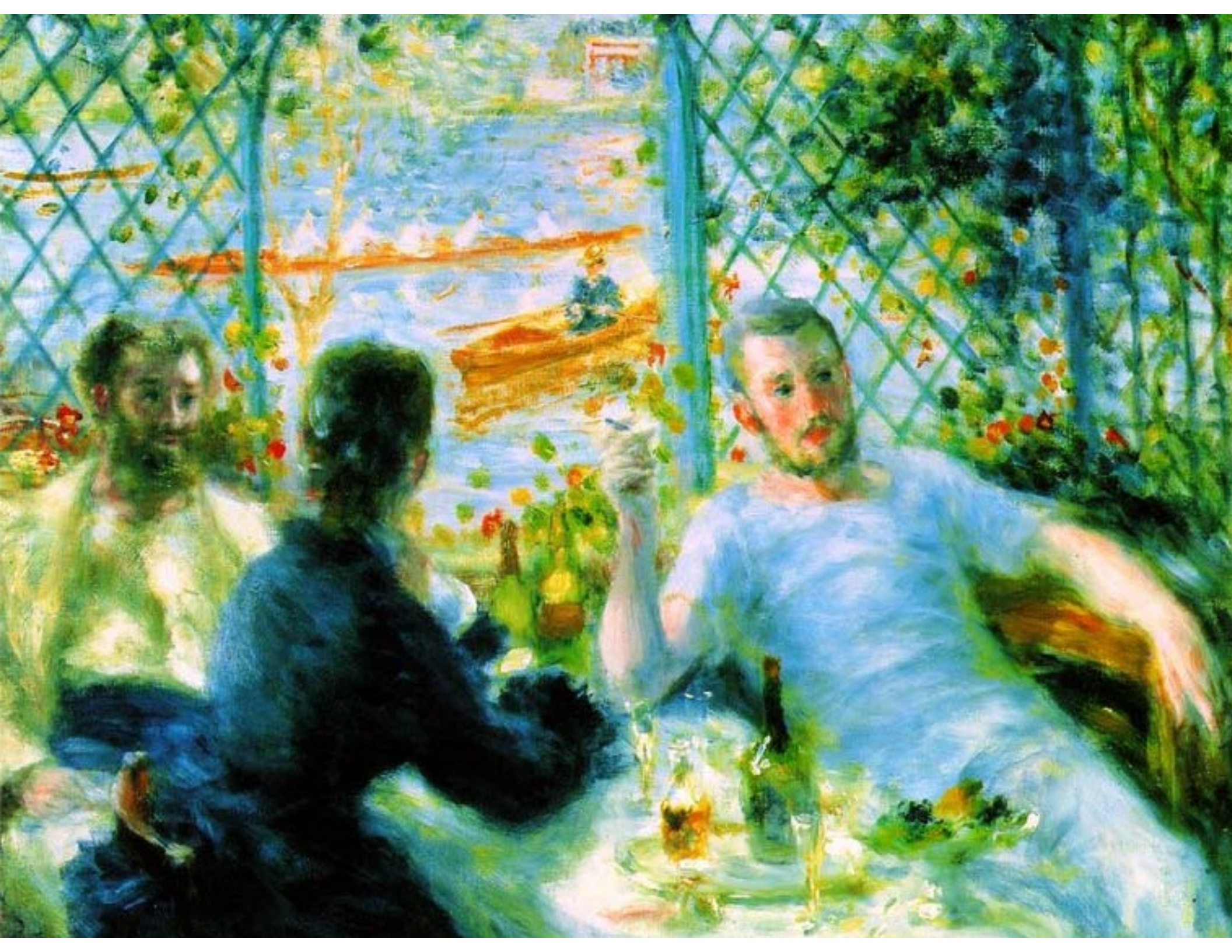
Architect of my fairyland,
Whenever it pleased me I made
A vanquished ocean flow
Into a tunnel of jewels;

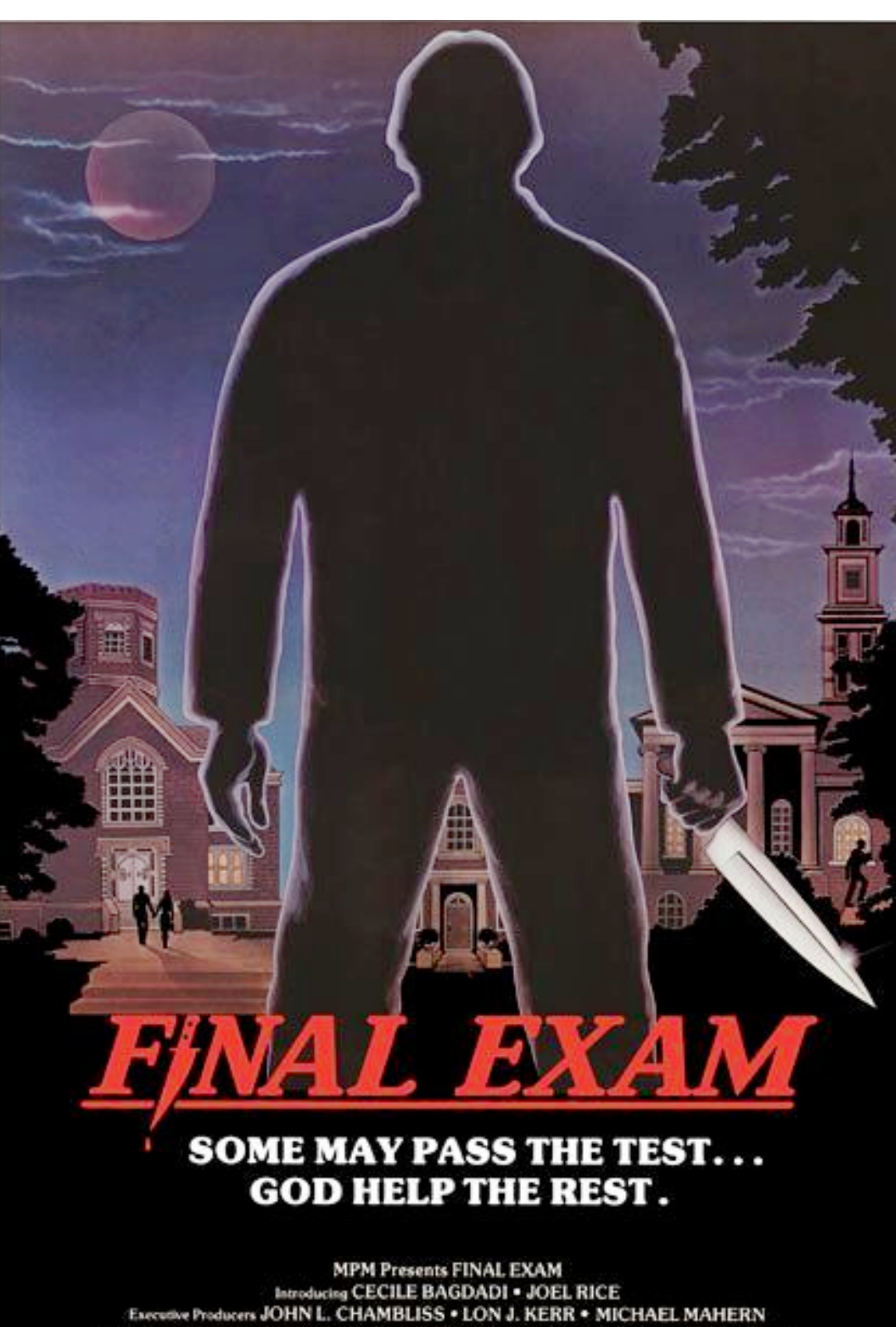
And all, even the color black,
Seemed polished, bright, iridescent,
Liquid enchased its own glory
In the crystallized rays of light.

Parisian Dream II

Opening my eyes full of flames
I saw my miserable room
And felt the cursed blade of care
Sink deep into my heart again;

The clock with its death-like accent
Was brutally striking noon;
The sky was pouring down its gloom
Upon the dismal, torpid world.





FINAL EXAM

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- Monday, May 6
- 7-10 PM
- Right in this room!
- 3 sections
 - Short answers to big questions
 - Short answers to small(er) questions
 - Identifications (sounds hard, but they are not)
- More detailed review this Wednesday